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Cultural elements and their categories in EFL textbooks

It has long been assumed that language and culture are interrelated: language echoes cultural values, norms of behaviour, attitudes and many other features of a particular sociocultural community. An important aspect of learning/ teaching a language is learning/ teaching its culture. The main goal of current foreign language (FL) education is to develop students into intercultural competent citizens and make them aware of various differences which lie between their native culture and the target one. As textbooks incorporate the cultural information, special attention should be paid to their cultural content. Cultural content can be reflected through textual material, exercises, illustrations which should aim at fostering knowledge of essential elements of FL culture and bring to their comparison with the essential elements of the native culture. This article compares the cultural contents of four English as a foreign language (EFL) textbook in terms of their inclusion of various categories of cultural elements. The purpose of the study is to identify what categories of cultural elements prevail in the EFL textbooks under analysis, which might influence, to a greater extent, language students' understanding of the culture being studied. Content analysis method has been used to determine data. The obtained results suggest that in all the four EFL textbooks elements describing material (surface) culture prevail, leaving aside elements pertaining to the 'axiological' (deep) culture which deals with values, norms, and attitudes.

Keywords: culture, EFL textbooks, cultural elements, intercultural competence, teaching, learning, categories, 'surface' culture, 'deep' culture.

Introduction

Globalization and internationalization have made it necessary to acquire intercultural knowledge and competence to be able to function in new cultures which are often different from one's own. This requires an answer in the FL classroom. Given the intercultural dimension of the globalized world, it has become essential in the language pedagogy to ensure the development of students' knowledge of the TL community, as well as their skills, to communicate appropriately with people from different cultural backgrounds.

Language and culture are interrelated, and teaching a language without culture may result in turning students into what Bennett calls "fluent fools" [1]. A fluent fool is someone who speaks a language well but struggles with realization of an adequate communication outside the context of the classroom, as he/she does not understand the social and cultural content of the language. As underscored by Gómez Rodríguez: "The necessity to learn a foreign language goes far beyond learning grammar forms veiled in communicative functions" [2;168].

In other words, the new perspective of the FL education in the era of communication with intercultural facet has affected both the teaching and the learning processes and also their indispensable part – textbooks. Culture cannot be ignored in the elaboration of FL textbooks which can be thought as one of the most essential tools employed in the FL setting being disadvantaged in regards to intercultural input [3].

As the main carriers of cultural information in the FL context, textbooks are expected to promote the means to address the studied foreign culture and foster student intercultural competence, which is defined as the quality of an individual to reach the level of a mediator of cultures without losing one's own identity [4].

In the light of the previous assertions, this article sets out to examine the cultural content of the EFL textbooks employed in the FL context of Kazakhstani higher school, namely, the categories of cultural elements these textbooks contain. The analysis was supported by theoretical views related to the definition of culture, the distinction between the categories of cultural elements, as well as various researches devoted to the exploration of the cultural component in EFL textbooks. Thus, the present study has a focus on the number and the extent of the TL cultural elements in the EFL textbooks and their distribution in terms of their belonging to the 'surface' and 'deep' levels of culture.

Literature review

Nowadays, intercultural interaction takes an essential role, and being able to communicate effectively across cultures is considered a valuable skill. Successful intercultural communication happens when communication partners share cultural norms, values, beliefs, and practices. Interacting with others who think, feel, and behave differently requires from one to understand, accept and develop a different way of thinking, feeling, and behaving. Thus, integration of the cultural component in the FL classroom has taken one of the leading positions, and culture has come to the fore of academic discussions in the FL teaching dimension.

Culture is a highly-complex and multifaceted phenomenon which in its general sense can be defined as “a set of beliefs, values, norms, customs, traditions, rituals, and a way of life that differentiates one group from another” [5; 12]. Current research views the notion of culture through three approaches which are relevant in the context of FL teaching. First, culture can be seen as knowledge [6]. This approach maintains the idea that culture bears information relating to beliefs, assumptions, values and reflects connections between these information. Secondly, culture may be viewed as a network of symbols. Byram observes that cultural meanings are encompassed in symbols and behavior, which is a symbolic action itself [7]. When people act, they refer to the shared meanings of culture which bind them together as a group. Thirdly, by understanding, what culture is and how it is constructed, people can become “agents of culture, not merely bearers of culture” and reshape the culture that surrounds them [8; 54].

Important for the present research is the division of culture into two levels: ‘surface’ culture and ‘deep’ culture. Edward T. Hall’s “cultural iceberg” analogy can help conceptualize these levels [9]. The ‘iceberg’ analogy illustrates differences when we start learning a new culture. The tip of the iceberg encompasses those aspects of culture which are readily seen on the surface, whereas its hidden part includes unconscious values, beliefs, sociocultural norms of behavior. The examples of surface culture are music, literature, holidays, national costumes, etc. The examples of deep culture include the concepts of food, friendship and love, lie and truth, the nature of family relations, etc. Table 1 illustrates aspects belonging to ‘surface’ and ‘deep’ levels of culture. To identify deep forms of culture may be difficult for language learners, as they are hidden and often have a multifaceted nature.

Table 1

Surface culture	Deep culture
Food Holidays Fashion	Values Attitudes Beliefs
Music Theatre Dances	Ways of communicating
Games Art Literature	Bahaviour rules Gestures Humour

To promote intercultural understanding, a concerted effort should be made to use materials that will enhance students’ awareness of the surface forms of the TL culture. Most importantly, that will aim at getting students ‘plunged’ into its deeper level. Being aware of cultural elements belonging to the deep level of culture helps language learners better understand and accept the culture they are learning, as well as it helps them better understand the behavior of the TL community. Thus, FL textbooks, in case they contain a variety of culture-related materials, play a significant role in the success of enhancing students’ knowledge and understanding of the both levels of the TL culture.

A plethora of researches is dedicated to the investigation of the cultural component in FL textbooks, highlighting their significance. For instance, Cortazzi and Jin refer to the textbook as a teacher, a map, a resource, a trainer, an authority being reliable, valid and compiled by experts [10]. Toprak and Aksoyalp claim that FL textbooks provide language learners with a route into the target language learning [3]. The same viewpoint is expressed by B    and Razi who underline that EFL textbooks have become “a significant source in presenting cultural information to FL learners systematically, especially when it is not possible to provide them with real-life environments” [11; 222]. Lund points out that “textbooks can provide valuable input when it comes to exposing students to new cultural expressions and to the diversity of culture” [12;47].

Following the abovementioned observations, the classroom seems to be the only place for language learners to experience encounters with the TL culture, and the textbook which is used plays a significant role in exposing students to new cultural elements and phenomena. On this account, Ihm observes that textbooks create cultural contacts for learners and provide them with authentic material, include examples how intercultural issues can be addressed [13].

The issue of investigating the cultural component in FL textbooks is one of the demanding problems of current FL education. Researchers dedicate their attention to various aspects of culture incorporation in FL textbooks. For instance, Toprak and Aksoyalp examined 17 English coursebooks written by international publishers to explore the extent and number of cultural representations presented in them and trace the distribution of these cultural representations across different English-speaking countries [3]. Gómez Rodríguez analyzed topics in EFL textbooks classifying them into two categories: surface culture and deep culture [2]. Ulum and Bada attempted to identify to what extent EFL course books included inner/outer cultural elements [14]. Abbasian and Biria examined EFL textbooks to determine how much national, international and target culturally familiar content was incorporated in them [15]. A common finding can be traced in the mentioned researches: the analyzed textbooks were found to be insufficient in relation to the incorporation of the cultural component. Since textbooks have adopted a significant role in fostering language learners' cultural knowledge and developing intercultural competence, a careful examination should be given to their cultural content. The present study sets out to explore the number of target cultural elements and their categories in the EFL textbooks.

Methods and materials

The textbooks selected for the analysis are used in the FL program of Kazakhstani higher school to train future teachers of English. All the textbooks are compiled for intermediate level students and are based on communicative approach to language teaching. A short characteristic of each textbook under analysis is presented below:

Textbook 1 — Straightforward — includes 12 units, each one comprising sections such as Grammar, Vocabulary, Functional language, Pronunciation, Reading and Listening, Speaking and Writing. Each unit contains one "Did you know?" section with short culture related texts presenting information about the English-speaking world [16].

Textbook 2 — New Inside Out — includes 12 units comprising the following sections: Speaking and Writing, Reading and Listening, Grammar, Vocabulary and Pronunciation. Each unit contains a sub-section called 'Anecdotes' which aims at developing student's speaking skills [17].

Textbook 3 — New English File — contains 7 units having the following sections: Grammar, Vocabulary, Pronunciation, Writing, Revise and Check. Moreover, each unit has 'Practical English' section which aims at developing students' skills of 'survival' in a FL communication context [18].

Textbook 4 — Basic English — has 11 units comprising the following sections: Grammar, Vocabulary with subsections called 'Idioms', Reading and Listening, Speaking which contains communicative tasks encouraging students to contrast and compare new cultural phenomena with phenomena of the native culture, Writing, and Review [19].

A quantitative content analysis was used to investigate the number of cultural elements presented in the EFL textbooks, as well as their categories. This type of analysis includes examining, interpreting and verifying the contents of written data. Krippendorff conceives quantitative content analysis as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" [20; 18]. Cohen et al. identify essential stages in conducting a quantitative content analysis: 1) breaking down text into units of analysis; 2) conducting a statistical analysis of the units; 3) presenting the obtained statistical data in an economic way. The EFL textbook analysis in the context of the present study presupposed a careful examination of the textual component contained in them [21]. The analysis excluded grammar sections and vocabulary lists.

There was employed a systematic method for identifying types of cultural elements that was developed by prominent Kazakhstani researcher Akhmetzhanova [22]. The researcher elaborated a classification of cultural elements consisting of three types:

a) cultural elements describing material culture. Cultural elements belonging to this group bear an explicit nature and comprise 'the surface' level of culture. This group of cultural elements accumulates fixed and static information, and the knowledge of such is not sufficient for learners to better understand the specificity of the TL culture.

b) axiological cultural elements relating to the 'deep' layer of culture and embodying unconscious values, beliefs, and attitudes of native speakers. As has been mentioned above, this type of cultural elements is the most difficult for learners to identify and understand, as they are invisible and demand deep knowledge.

c) cultural elements relating to speech behaviour of native speakers. This type of cultural elements embodies specifics of communicative culture of the TL community and includes speech clichés, forms of ad-

dress, etc. which reflect the characteristics of the speech behavior of native speakers in everyday communication. This type of cultural elements also belongs to the ‘deep’ level of culture.

Results and Discussion

The research question was concerned with the categories of cultural elements contained in the EFL textbooks and the number of elements pertaining to each category. It was important to identify if the elements belonging to the ‘deep’ level of culture are present in the textbooks and whether their number is sufficient, as awareness of such elements lays the basis for understanding the TL culture in a more effective way.

Figure 1 demonstrates the results related to the number of a certain category of cultural elements in the EFL textbooks.

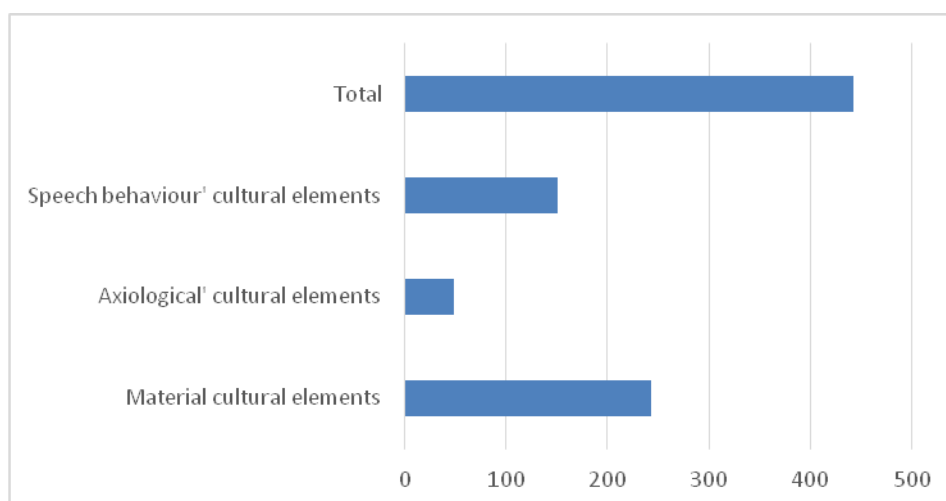


Figure 1. Distribution of cultural elements into categories

Table 2 gives a more detailed account of distribution of cultural elements into categories within the EFL textbooks selected for the analysis.

Table 2

Categories of cultural elements in the EFL textbooks

	Total number of cultural elements in a textbook	Cultural elements describing material culture (surface culture)	Axiological cultural elements (deep culture)	Cultural elements relating to speech behavior of native speakers (deep culture)
Textbook 1 — Straightforward	105	49	18	38
Textbook 2 — New Inside Out	86	37	10	39
Textbook 3 — New English File	104	61	9	34
Textbook 4 — Basic English	148	96	12	40

As Figure 1 suggests the most loaded category holding 243 cultural elements was the one describing or surface TL culture. This group of cultural elements prevails separately in all the four EFL textbooks. The category of ‘surface’ cultural elements is followed by a group of cultural elements relating to speech behavior of native speakers which includes 151 elements. The least frequent category made up of only 49 elements refers to the group of “axiological” cultural elements, i.e., those belonging to the deep level of culture.

Let us give a short description of the categories of cultural elements contained in each EFL textbook under analysis.

Textbook 1 contains 49 units belonging to the first category of cultural elements, that is, to the group describing the surface culture. There are elements denoting names of food and drinks (*sherry, traditional, traditional British foods, Mediterranean diet*), the names of political parties (*the Tory, the Labour party, the Liberal Democrats*), the names of sports games (cricket, rugby), titles of films and names of heroes of novels by British writers (*Hit film About a Boy, Walter Mitty, Captain Mitty*), titles of newspapers, magazines, organizations (*The Daily Telegraph, BT (British Telecom)*) and so on. The second group consists of 18 cultural elements which embody a specific cultural value for representatives of the linguocultural community being studied. The teaching of such cultural concepts aims at bringing home to the learners the idea of how native speakers perceive the surrounding world, what present a certain cultural value for them. The third group comprises 38 cultural elements which can be characterized as speech clichés, or, ready communicative fragments.

The analysis of the cultural content of Textbook 2 shows that it contains a small number of cultural elements. Cultural elements are presented in the material of the textbook, mainly, in the form of onyms. To the group of ‘material’ cultural elements which is 37 in number there belong names of national dishes, names of organizations, items of national clothes, e.g., *shepherd’s pie, Action Aid, MSNBC*, and others. This group also includes names of holidays and festivals, names of famous people, names of literary works and feature films. For example, *Mardi Gras, International Oyster Festival, Mr. Nice Guy*. The textbook contains only 10 elements pertaining to the group of ‘axiological’ cultural elements. One of the examples which can be given here is the concept of *white lies*. The essence of the concept is not explained directly in the text, its meaning is implicit in it. However, after reading the text, language learners can easily guess that the idiom ‘white lies’ corresponds to the Russian idiom ‘sweet lies’. If in the Russian culture the lie is metaphorically similar to sweetness, in the TL culture this idiom is based on color recognition — white color in the British culture symbolizes innocence. Since Textbook 2 is a communicative one, its audio texts contain a sufficient number of speech-behavioral cultural elements which make 39 in number.

Textbook 3, as well as the first two EFL textbooks, includes a small number of texts reflecting the culture of the speakers of the target language. Overall, 61 cultural elements which belong to the category of material culture were identified in during the analysis. These are mainly names of dishes, sports, and family ties. The textbook contains only 9 elements which reflect beliefs of the TL speakers. There were identified 34 elements relating to speech behavior of native speakers. These are concentrated, to a greater extent, in audio texts and exercises which aim at practicing these elements. In addition, the audio texts contain cultural elements denoting names of national dishes, the meaning of some elements mentioned in the conversation is revealed directly by the communicants. E.g., *Well, we are open in the morning, and we serve traditional English breakfasts, and then we have a lot of English desserts at lunchtime, for example trifle — that’s a typical English dessert made with fruit and cake and cream. And we do proper English teas in the afternoon — tea with cakes and sandwiches*. In this example, the sentence contains three cultural elements — traditional English breakfast, trifle, English tea. The meaning of the traditional English dessert ‘trifle’ is explained, two other cultural elements may cause confusion of EL learners who may fail to know what constitutes traditional English breakfast and traditional English tea. Another example: *The thing I most miss living in Chile is English cheese. I really miss Stilton — which is a wonderful English blue cheese*. In this sentence, the cultural element is represented by the name of the famous English cheese — Stilton, the meaning of this unit is revealed by the speaker.

Textbook 4 presents cultural elements of the three above-mentioned categories to a different degree. Thus, the textual material contains 96 ‘surface’ cultural elements, reflecting both the target culture and students’ native culture. For example: *camisole, caftan, Morris dancer, Beatle mops, bed and breakfast, Yorkshire pudding, fish and chips*, etc. The examples of elements describing students’ native culture are *kalingdik, kalingmal, singsu, zhar-zhar, betashar, korimdik*. The group of ‘axiological’ cultural elements is presented in the textbook texts in an insignificant number with only 12 elements. Let us give some examples. One of the texts describing a Kazakh wedding contains such expressions as “Bridegrooms are for a hundred years, but in-laws are for a thousand years” and “Each person has three sets of relatives: his father’s relatives, his mother’s relatives, and his in-laws” convey respect for the parents of the bride or groom. As for the axiological linguistic culture of the target language, the following examples can be cited:

The text titled *Why is the Tower of London so popular with tourists?* explains the importance of black ravens — tower black ravens, traditionally living in the Tower of London and having symbolic meaning for

the British. In the British culture the idea was that if the crows left the Tower, then both the Tower itself and the British monarchy would collapse. Or, for example, the expression *Begin with the end in mind* is a statement by Stephen Covey, which reflects one of the principles of effective life in the British society — start any business from the end. One more example is *white mistletoe* which is not just a name for a plant, as the expression also carries a cultural significance. The mistletoe is considered a magical flower and is associated with Christmas beliefs and rituals. There is a tradition among the British to kiss under a branch of mistletoe at Christmas. It is believed that a kiss under the mistletoe will bring love, prosperity and health in the new year.

Thus, the findings indicate that the EFL textbooks contain primarily elements belonging to the level of surface culture. Invisible forms of culture which are crucial for understanding the TL culture are insignificant in number. It can be assumed that the inclusion of a limited number of elements reflecting the deep level of culture in a FL textbook may result in the formation of superficial and non-critical vision of the target language culture. Still, the analyzed textbooks can be seen as a valuable source of information depicting the specificities of communicative behavior of a TL community. Through learning such elements, language learners come to the understanding that communicative behavior across cultures differs and that to be efficient in intercultural communication one should be able to recognize these differences.

Conclusions

Teaching culture has become an essential part of language teaching. With the advent of intercultural approach, there has been traced a shift in the teaching paradigm, and consequently, it brought changes to the way how TL culture is presented and transmitted in the FL classroom.

Since the world is becoming globalized, it is essential to develop learners' intercultural competence, i.e. knowledge and skills which will help them effectively communicate in intercultural settings. In this respect, textbooks should aim at involving language learners into the study of the TL culture and equipping them with the necessary knowledge and skills. At this point, incorporating the cultural component into EFL textbooks can be seen as a sound approach to help language learners become interculturally competent, to enhance their cultural awareness and promote their openness, readiness and curiosity towards the target culture.

The present study aimed at examining the number of cultural elements and their categories in the EFL textbooks employed in the language programs of Kazakhstani higher school. For this purpose, content quantitative was conducted on the four EFL textbooks.

The findings revealed that the cultural elements are mainly concentrated on reflecting 'surface' culture of the TL community, as in all the four textbooks the group of elements of this type is the largest. Intercultural competence presupposes cultural knowledge and cultural awareness, which indicates that students should develop knowledge and awareness of 'deep' culture elements. Lack of such knowledge can result in the development of student biased attitude to the culture being studied. If textbooks are much concentrated on the 'surface' culture and contain an insufficient number of cultural elements underlying beliefs and assumptions of native speakers, they can lead to the formation of a 'surface' view in regards to the TL culture. In this sense, language learners will not be involved in deeper analytical analysis of the culture being studied. Consequently, before employing a FL textbook it is important to analyze its content in terms of categories of cultural elements it contains. This may help to make the process of teaching/learning the TL culture more balanced and effective.

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Ағылшынтіліоқулықтарындағымәдени элементтердіңтипологиясы

Тілді оқу мен оқытудың маңызды аспектісі оның мәдениетін оқу мен оқыту болыпта былады. Қазіргі шеттілдік білім берудің негізгі мақсаты студенттердің мәдениетаралық коммуникативті құзыреттілігін қалыптастыру, бұл басқа мәдениет өкілдерімен сәтті және лайықты өзара әрекеттесу үшін қажетті қабілеттер жиынтығы. Шеттілі оқулықтарында мәдени ақпарат қамтылғандықтан, оның мәдени мазмұнына да ерекше назар аудару қажет. Оқулықтың мәдени мазмұны мәтіндік материалда, жаттығуларда, иллюстрацияларда көрініс табады, олар білім алушылардың шет тіл мәдениетінің негізгі элементтері туралы білімдерін тереңдетуге және оларды өз мәдениетінің негізгі элементтерімен салыстыруға бағытталуы тиіс. Мақала В2 деңгейіндегі бакалавр — болашақ ағылшын тілі пәні мұғалімдерін дайындауда шет тілі пәні бойынша қолданылатын оқулықтардың мәдени компонентін зерттеуге арналған. Зерттеудің мақсаты — талданатын АТО-да оқытылатын шет тілі мәдениетінің қандай элементтері (материалдық — фактологиялық, аксиологиялық, сөйлеу — тану) басым екенін анықтау. Сапалы деректерді анықтау үшін мазмұнды талдау әдістемесі қолданылды. Талдау нәтижелері барлық төрт ағылшын тілі оқулықтарында материалдық (үстірт) мәдениетті сипаттайтын элементтер басым екендігін көрсетеді. Басқа лингвосоциумның әлем бейнесін түсіну үшін қажет аксиологиялық және сөйлеу — тану мәдени бірліктеріне аз көңіл бөлінеді. ШТО таңдаған кезде, мұғалім оқулықта қандай мәдени элементтер басым екенін анықтау үшін оған талдау жасауы керек. Егер оқу материалы материалдық-фактологиялық мәдени бірліктер саны көбірек қамтитын болса, оқытылатын шет тілінің рухани мәдениетінің ерекшеліктерін ашатын қосымша материалға жүгіну қажет.

Кілт сөздер: мәдениет, ағылшын тілі оқулығы, мәдени элемент, мәдениетаралық-коммуникативтік құзыреттілік, шет тілін оқыту, категория, «үстірт» мәдениет, «терең» мәдениет.

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Типология культурных элементов в учебниках по английскому языку

Важным аспектом изучения/преподавания языка является изучение/преподавание его культуры. Основная цель современного иноязычного образования заключается в развитии межкультурно-коммуникативной компетенции обучающихся, которая представляет собой совокупность способностей, необходимых для успешного и адекватного взаимодействия с представителями иной культуры. Поскольку учебник по иностранному языку включает в себя и культурную информацию, особое внимание следует уделять его культурному содержанию. Культурное содержание учебника находит отражение в текстовом материале, в упражнениях, иллюстрациях, которые должны быть направлены на углубление знаний обучающихся об основных элементах культуры изучаемого языка и их сравнении с основными элементами родной культуры. Статья посвящена изучению культурного компонента учебников по иностранному языку, используемых при подготовке бакалавров-будущих учителей английского языка (УАЯ) и культуры на уровне В2. Цель исследования — определить, какие элементы изучаемой культуры (материально-фактологические, аксиологические, речеповеденческие) преобладают в анализируемых УАЯ. Для определения качественных данных использовалась методология контент-анализа. Результаты проведенного анализа свидетельствуют о том, что во всех четырех учебниках по английскому языку преобладают элементы, описывающие материальную (поверхностную) культуру. Аксиологическим и речеповеденческим культурным единицам, знание которых необходимо для понимания картины мира иного лингвосоциума, отводится незначительное место. При выборе УИЯ преподавателю необходимо проводить его анализ для того, чтобы установить, культурные элементы какого типа преобладают. В случае если учебный материал включает большее количество материально-фактологических культурных единиц, необходимо обращаться к дополнительному материалу, раскрывающему особенности духовной культуры носителей изучаемого языка.

Ключевые слова: культура, учебник по английскому языку, культурный элемент, межкультурно-коммуникативная компетенция, обучение ИЯ, категория, «поверхностная» культура, «глубинная» культура.

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